

How to interview *the right* data science talent

Data scientists are important ambassadors for the understanding, education and adoption of AI in the business world, so hiring the right talent is crucial to business success. So, you've shortlisted your candidates and you're inviting a strong selection of candidates to a first interview. How do you know if someone will be the right cultural fit and can help drive business impact?

928 interviews later and 336 successful data science hires for companies including JustEat, Google and Virgin Media, I want to share a couple of my top tips with you. I'm Maria by the way - **Head of Fellowship at Faculty, a leading AI company.**

If you have a long list of PhD and Masters qualified applicants - you go through their CV's, their repository of code, their research papers - it's hard to distinguish which very clever person should join your organisation. A good distinguisher is what soft skills the candidates have - what are they like when communicating with clients or the CEO?

Often overlooked in data science interviews, below are some of my favourite non-technical interview questions and some tips on what you should be looking out for in candidate answers:

01 *Stakeholder management capability and experience*

Managing stakeholders is a critical component to the successful delivery of any data science project as they work with a variety of technical and non-technical stakeholders. It's crucial they are approachable, can work collaboratively and build strong, trusting relationships with colleagues.

Suggested interview questions:

Describe a time when you used your communication and interpersonal skills to manage difficult clients/colleagues.

What to look out for:

Understanding the industry you'll be working in and the role of data science will allow you to show your personal interest in the goals of the business and give you a good indication of what you will be working on.

Give an example of a win-win situation you negotiated with a variety of stakeholders.

What to look out for:

Look out for examples where candidates have to adapt their communication - whether that's the language or channels they use - to best resonate with their audiences. Negotiation is often about compromise - look out for examples where candidates have adapted their approach to reach a solution.

Describe a situation where you were given feedback on your performance that wasn't what you had hoped for.

What to look out for:

You're looking out for candidates who can accept and learn from constructive criticism - having a self-awareness of your strengths and weaknesses is a good thing. Also pay attention to the candidates' emotional response here - were they genuinely accepting or positive of the feedback?

02 *Good storytelling and clear communication*

Data science is not a discipline everyone is familiar with. Therefore, a key skill for data scientists is to be able to communicate effectively at all levels of the business with the required level of detail - both to showcase results, but also to champion for the right decisions to be made.

Suggested interview questions:

Pretend I'm someone who has never heard of ML - can you explain what it is to me?

What to look out for:

Whether they can clearly articulate the subject in a concise, clear and non-technical manner. This question is testing whether they can adapt their communication approach to different audiences.

Describe a time when you misunderstood a task and what steps you took to rectify it?

What to look out for:

How adaptable and flexible are they in their communication approaches? Are they iterating/improving or do they expect the responsibility should be on other stakeholders to communicate to them in a different way?

Don't forget

In every answer, test their non-verbal communication - that includes their body language, active listening skills and sincerity.

What to look out for:

It's hard whilst interviewing remotely - but it's still worth evaluating the candidates' body language and active listening skills. Does the conversation feel natural? Are they articulating their role in the situation clearly? Are they making assumptions or asking for clarity? How are they presenting themselves?

Need help looking for the right data science talent?

The Faculty Fellowship is an eight-week programme designed to help organisations expand their data science teams the easy way. We dedicate **50+ hours per programme interviewing candidates**, which includes 80+ rounds of interviews, many more hours assessing technical/coding skills and 10+ hours of feedback and offers - just to find our partner companies the best candidates. With a time investment of 2-3 hours, you will have a highcalibre data scientist join your company within weeks.

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